

THE VOICE OF FREEDOM.

Extracts from Jay's "View of the Action of the Federal Government in Behalf of Slavery." [Second Edition.]

ORIGIN OF THE FLORIDA WAR.

It will be recollected, that in 1816, the slaveholders complained that their fugitive slaves found refuge in Florida, then belonging to the crown of Spain; and that, regardless of the obligations of neutrality, a naval force had been sent by the Government up the river Apalachicola, to destroy a fort containing about 300 negroes, most of whom were slaughtered. This territory was afterward ceded to the United States; and for several years past, the Government has been waging a relentless and most disastrous war against its aboriginal inhabitants, with the avowed design of driving them from the Peninsula. It is not our design to write the history of this war, but merely to expose its true origin, and to explain the motives which have led the whites to insist on the expulsion of the Seminoles, and the causes which have induced the latter to offer a resistance unparalleled in savage warfare, for persevering and desperate courage and ferocity.

The sacrifice on our part, of blood, of treasure, and of military honor in this war, is well known to be prodigious. THIRTY MILLIONS of dollars have already, it is said, been expended—our best generals have been killed, and their laurels withered; and our troops have perished in great numbers, in contests with their savage foe, and by the sickness of the climate. And yet no rational cause is assigned by the Government for this disastrous war. No reason is given why it is necessary, at all hazards, and at every expense, to drive the Seminoles from Florida. The whites are few in number, have far more land than they can occupy and certainly do not want the wet and unwholesome everglades possessed by the Indians, and into which, we are told, white men can only penetrate at certain seasons of the year, without exposing their lives to certain destruction. But were the Seminoles so numerous that it was necessary to remove them, to make room for the whites, or so powerful as to render it unsafe to plant white settlements in Florida? We learn from official reports, that they numbered about 3000! Major-General Jessup, the commanding officer of the army, and well acquainted with the existing condition of the Territory, in a letter to the Secretary of War, Feb. 11, 1838, makes the following candid avowal.

"We have committed the error of attempting to remove them (the Seminoles) when their lands were not required for agricultural purposes; when they were not in the way of the white inhabitants, and when the greater portion of their country was an unexplored wilderness, of the interior of which we were as ignorant as of the interior of China."

I do not consider the country south of Chickasaw Hatchee worth the medicines we shall expend in driving the Indians from it. Why, then, all this waste of blood and treasure? We answer—TO PREVENT FUGITIVE SLAVES FROM FINDING AN ASYLUM AMONG THE INDIANS!

We well know how unwillingly this truth will be received by those among us who contend that the North has nothing to do with slavery; but we appeal to facts—and to facts about which there is and can be no dispute.

Florida borders upon two slave States, Alabama and Georgia, and is not far distant from two others, Mississippi and Louisiana. It is not, therefore, surprising that slaves from these States, escaping from their masters, should seek refuge in the huts of the Seminoles. We have already seen that the Federal Government have lately awarded upwards of \$5000 to the gallant officers and seamen who destroyed 300 fugitive slaves in Florida, in 1816. The terrible example then made, was not, it seems effectual; for in 1825, the War Department issued an order on the subject of fugitive slaves among the Seminoles, and the Indian Agent at Tallahassee was directed to take measures to enable the claimants to identify their property for its immediate restoration. "Let the Chiefs distinctly understand," wrote the Agent, agreeably to his instruction, "that they are not to harbor runaway negroes; and that they will be required to give such negroes as are now residing within their limits."

An Alabama paper, speaking of the war, makes the following confession: "It is the power to entice away and instruct in bush-fighting so many of our slaves, that we would wish to annihilate. These Seminoles cannot remain in the Peninsula of Florida without threatening the internal safety of the South."

In 1834, a petition signed by about one hundred of the inhabitants of Alachua County, Florida, was presented to President Jackson, praying for his interposition against the Seminoles.

"While the lawless and indomitable people (says the petition) continue where they now are, the owners of slaves in our territory, and even in the States contiguous, cannot for a moment, in any thing like security, enjoy the possession of this description of property. Does a negro become tired of the service of his owner, he has only to flee to the Indian country, where he will find ample safety against pursuit. It is a fact which, if not susceptible of proof, is, notwithstanding, and upon good ground, firmly believed, that there is at this time living under the protection of the Seminole Indians, a large number, probably more than one hundred slaves, who have absconded from their masters in the neighboring States and in Florida, since the treaty of Camp Moultrie. Within a few weeks several parties are known to have sought and found shelter in the nation where they continue secure against every effort of their owners to recover them."

There are, as it is believed, more than five hundred negroes residing with the Seminole Indians, four-fifths of whom are runaways, or descendants of runaways.

It is perfectly obvious that during the existence of such a state of things, the interests of this fertile and promising section of Florida cannot flourish; and we are constrained to report that there is no rational prospect for the better so long as the Indians are suffered to remain in their present location."

The petition concludes with recommending "the immediate and efficient action of the Government."

In the spring of 1839, a sort of armistice was concluded with the Seminoles. This gave vast offence to the slaveholders, and at a public meeting held at Tallahassee, it was resolved, "That the peninsula of Florida is the last place in the limits of the United States wherein the Indians should be permitted to remain." For this assertion, the following among other reasons was assigned.

"If located in Florida, all the runaway slaves will find refuge and protection with them." The New Orleans Courier of the 27th July, 1839, in reference to this same subject remarks, "Every year's delay in subduing the Seminoles, adds to the risk of their being joined by runaway slaves from the adjacent States, and increases the danger of a rising among the serfites."

SLAVERY, then, is the key which unlocks the enigmas of the Florida war. To break up a refuge for runaway slaves, THIRTY MILLIONS have already been expended; and if necessary thirty millions more will be expended for the same object.

But it may be said, however satisfactorily the foregoing facts may account for the conduct of the Federal Government, they do not explain the astonishing and peculiar inveteracy manifested by these Seminoles towards the whites. Other tribes have without difficulty been removed to the west of the Mississippi; why then do these Indians alone offer a resistance to a superior power, determined and more heroic than perhaps any recorded in history? Again does SLAVERY solve the difficulty.

It is very obvious that the Seminoles have been universally exasperated. Their extreme hatred to the whites, has unquestionably been owing in part to the gross and wicked frauds which they believe (with too much apparent reason) were practiced in the treaty of Payne's Landing, under which they were required to remove from Florida. But the great and prevailing cause of their deep-seated hostility, is to be sought for in a long train of frauds and injuries of which they have been the victims, on account of their slaves; and likewise in the dread of Christian slavery, entertained by the negroes who belong to, or have joined the Seminoles.

Of all the hostile chiefs, the most active, persevering and daring, was the celebrated OSEOLA. It is said that this man's mother was seized and carried into Georgia as a slave, under pretence that she was the daughter of a fugitive negroess. If this story, which has found its way into the public papers, be true, the wrongs of the mother have been terribly avenged by the son.

That the reader may understand the narratives we are about to lay before him, he must bear in mind that the Seminoles, like their more civilized neighbors, are slaveholders—but, unlike them, they exercise their authority in such a manner as to render their slaves unwilling to leave them. The slaves are in fact little more than tenants of claim and familiar landlords, and regard with horror the very idea of being transferred from their hearth to Christian masters. But there were many of the whites, who were exceedingly anxious to make the transfer. The agent, Wily Thompson, thus wrote to the Secretary of War: (Oct. 27, 1831.) "There are many very likely negroes in this nation. Some of the whites in the adjacent settlements manifest a restless desire to obtain them and I have no doubt that Indian-raised negroes are now in possession of the whites."

The volume of documents submitted to Congress 3d June, 1836, and entitled "Seminole hostilities," from which we quote, contains many illustrations of the agent's assertion; we can spare room for only a portion of them.

It appears that Conchattimico, a Florida chief, was the possessor of a number of slaves, the title to whom was disputed by another Indian, who sold his claim to a white man. The means taken by the publisher to obtain the slaves, are thus described by the Agent in his letter to the War Department, Jan. 20, 1834.

"I was informed by the sub-agent, that Conchattimico sent a runner for him not long since; that he immediately repaired to the old chief's town, where he arrived in the night, and found the Indians and negroes greatly excited and in arms; and that very soon thereafter Yacca Pechasse, with fifteen or more of his warriors in arms arrived, for the purpose of aiding in resistance of a threatened violent attempt to force the slaves out of Conchattimico's possession. Persons interested in the adverse claim, were frequently seen hovering about the reserve; and the chief was informed that attempts had been made to bribe commanders of steamboats, on the river, to aid in accomplishing the capture of the slaves."

Under such circumstances I could not but approve the order given by the sub-agent to Conchattimico, to defend his property by force should a violent attempt be made to wrest it from him.

Shortly after this, Judge Cameron, of the United States District Court, investigated the white man's claim to the slaves, and pronounced it groundless. Notwithstanding this decision, the claim was again sold to a company of whites, who resolved to relieve the chief of his property. But as the chief intended to protect it by force of arms, the enterprise was not free from danger. The expedition resorted to by the kidnappers is thus explained in a letter from the late Governor of the Territory to the Secretary of War, 23d May, 1836.

"I herewith transmit you a petition from the Indian chief Conchattimico, to be laid before Congress should you consider that necessary. Taking forcibly the slaves of this chief, after those men had created an alarm among the white inhabitants which resulted in disarming the Indians, was an outrage well calculated to rouse them to hostility. The alarm was concerted by these violators of all law, solely with the view of obtaining without danger of resistance, the slaves of the chief. I have no expectation the slaves referred to in the petition will ever be obtained, as I take it for granted they have been carried to a great distance and sold."

This Conchattimico was a friendly chief, having no intercourse with the hostile Seminoles;—but on the report being raised that he was about to join the enemy, he surrendered his arms to quiet the apprehensions, real or affected, of his white neighbors. No sooner had he thus rendered himself defenceless, than a party of Georgians carried off his slaves twenty in number, and valued at \$15,000.

We have already seen how profitable it is for a Georgian to loose a slave among the Indians; but Congress has provided no fund to indemnify the Indian master for the slaves of which he may be robbed by the Georgians.

Another friendly Florida chief, Pechassie, thus complains to the agent, (28th July 1835.) "I am induced to write to you in consequence of the depredations making, and attempted to be made on my farm, by a company of men, negro-stealers; some of whom are from Columbus, (Georgia) and have connected themselves with Brown and Douglas. It is reported, and believed by all white people around here, that a large number of them

will very shortly come down here, and attempt to take off Billy, Jim, Rose and her family, and others (slaves). . . . I should like to have you advise how I should act. I dislike to make any trouble, or have any difficulty with the white people; but if they trespass on my premises, and on my rights, I must defend myself the best way I can. . . . Please direct me how to act in this matter. Douglas and his company hired a man, who has two large trained dogs for the purpose, to come down and take Billy. The man came, but seeing he could do nothing alone, has gone off somewhere, probably to recruit. He is from Mobile, and follows for a livelihood catching runaway negroes with these large dogs."

By a letter from the United States Attorney, we find that Pechassie was subsequently "robbed of all the negroes he had, some six in number."

As these robberies were committed on friendly chiefs, and after the commencement of the Seminole war, they excited the attention and alarm of the officers of Government, and hence probably it is that official notice was taken of them. They may give us some idea of the provocation which preceded and caused the war. Indeed the documents before us incidentally show, that the "likely negroes" of the Seminoles now in arms, were as strongly coveted by the whites, as the slaves of the friendly chiefs. By a treaty made with the Seminoles in 1832, the Federal Government with its usual solicitude for the interests of slaveholders, assumed the payment of all claims on the Indians for "slaves and other property" to the amount of \$7,000. A scramble of course ensued for the money, & a voluminous correspondence took place between the Agent and Secretary of War, respecting claims for Indian slaves; & it appears that the Seminoles had been harassed for years by the contrivances of the whites to rob them of their slaves. The following is a sample. It seems that a Mrs. Hanna claimed a negro woman and her increase, in possession of the Seminoles. The claim had been made known to the war department, and so long ago as the 5th March, 1828, the following mandate had been issued to the Indian agent. "The Secretary of War directs that you forthwith deliver to Mary Hanna, widow, or her agent, the slaves claimed by her, and take a bond imposing the obligation on her to abide by such decision as it may be esteemed proper to seek, in testing the right of ownership in the property in question." We have here a specimen of the justice meted by our government to the Indians. A woman claims a slave in the possession of an Indian. Without the slightest inquiry into the justice of the claim, the property is ordered to be wrested forthwith from the possessor and delivered to the claimant, and then as if in utter mockery, the woman is to give her bond to abide any decision that may hereafter be made as to the legality of her claim. Who is to obtain this decision? Certainly not the woman, and should the poor ignorant Indian go to law, where would he look for Mrs. Hanna and her slaves? From some cause not explained, the wicked and absurd order of the Secretary was not executed; and on the 2d March, 1835, seven years after, a second order from the Secretary of War directed the agent "to afford whatever facilities may be in his power, upon the claim being established by proper proof before the competent tribunal, to have the property restored to Mrs. Hanna." Should the reader be struck with the remarkable moral difference between these two orders, the explanation is easy—the office was filled at the time of the first order by a slaveholder; at the time of the second, by a northern gentleman. The agent now investigated the case, and it was discovered that the father of Mrs. Hanna, about the year 1813, had sold the woman in question, then full grown, to a Seminole, for forty steers, and had afterwards, as was alleged given the same woman to his daughter; and on this pretended gift Mrs. Hanna claimed, not merely the woman, who had now lived twenty-five years with the Indians, but also all the children she had borne within that time!

On the 12th of December, 1834, the agent wrote to the Secretary, that a Seminole woman of the name of Nelly, inherited from her father "a considerable number of slaves," that a man named Floyd claims the whole of them by virtue of a bill of sale, and that Nelly insists that "Floyd imposed upon her by presenting for signature a bill of sale for all her negroes, instead of a written authority to him to recover some from her." The agent adds, he has seen one who pretends that Floyd paid her for the negroes, and that the universal impression is that she was grossly imposed upon.

If civilized and Christian slaveholders are ready to murder, or to use Mr. Preston's phrase, to HANG abolitionists for questioning their moral right to hold property in man; we may judge what must have been the exasperation of the Seminoles at these multiplied attempts to rob them of their slaves.

There is still another mode in which slavery has operated to produce and continue the war in Florida. Although the expulsion of the Seminoles from the peninsula was devoutly desired by the whites, no inclination was felt to send their "likely negroes" to the west of the Mississippi. Of these negroes some were stolen, others claimed under fraudulent pretences, and others it was proposed to purchase of their masters. General R. K. Call addressed a letter to President Jackson, (22d March, 1835,) asking leave "to purchase ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY" of the Seminole negroes. "These negroes," he affirms, "are violently opposed to leaving the country. If the Indians are permitted to convert them into SPECIE, one great obstacle in the way of removal may be overcome." The applicant was informed that no permission was necessary—there being no legal prohibition to the Indians selling their slaves. Agents were forthwith despatched to the nation, to buy up negroes. Mr. W. Thompson, the agent, however, assumed the responsibility of prohibiting these agents from commencing their negotiations; and assigned his reasons in a very able letter to the Secretary of War (27th April, 1835.) The intercourse law, he remarked, "prohibited the purchase of an Indian pony by a member of civilized society, without permission from the agent, and why? but because the Indian is considered in a state of pupilage, and incapable of protecting himself against the arts and wiles of civilized man. If the Indian's interest in a pony is of so much importance in the estimation of the government, as to require such strict guards to be thrown around it, the protection of his interest in his slave should be esteemed more important, by as much as the latter is more valuable than the former species of property. If in the regulation of ponies the United States exercise a rightful power,

the obligation on them to guard the interests of the Indian in his slave, is more imposing. The negroes in the nation dread the idea of being transferred from their present state of ease and comparative liberty, to bondage and hard labor, on sugar and cotton plantations."

"They have always had a great influence over the Indians. They live in villages separate, and in many instances remote from their owners, and enjoy equal liberty with their owners, with the single exception that the slave supplies his own corn annually from the product of his little field, with corn in proportion to the amount of the crop—in no instance that has come so my knowledge, exceeding ten bushels; the residue is considered the property of the slave. Many of these slaves have stocks of horses, cows and hogs, with which the Indian owners never assume a right to interfere. I am thus particular on this point, that you may understand the true cause of the abhorrence of the negroes of every idea of change. And the indulgence so extended to the slave, will enable you to credit the assertion, that an Indian would almost as soon sell his child as his slave, except when under the influence of intoxicating liquors."

We have here a picture of certainly a very extraordinary system of slavery. Slaves abhorring a change, and masters no more thinking of selling a slave than a child! But then these Indians were heathen, and perhaps it was from not adhering to the fact, that General Call took for granted they would be glad to convert men, women, and children into SPECIE. President Jackson was equally inconsiderate. The agent was answered, "The President is of opinion, that the opportunity to sell their slaves will be an inducement for the Seminoles to remove. . . . Nor is it considered that the permission to the Indians to sell, would be an inhuman act. It is not to be presumed the condition of these slaves would be worse than that of others in the same section of the country."

To this presumption of executive philanthropy the agent forcibly replied, (June 17th, 1835.) "The remarks in your letter that 'it is not to be presumed the condition of these slaves would be worse than that of others in the same section of country, is true; yet you will agree with me, that the same remark is applicable to myself, or any other individual in the United States, as we should, if subjected to slavery, be in the precise condition of our fellow slaves. . . . Any one at all acquainted with the condition of the negro, as connected with his Indian owner here, could not fail to admit that the change with him would be oppressively great." Mr. Thompson farther remarked to the Secretary of War, "If the department could be satisfied that the undeniable abhorrence of the negroes in this nation to the idea of being transferred from the present state of ease and comparative freedom, to sugar and cotton plantations, under the control of severe task-masters, had been made to subvert the views of government by inducing the negroes to exert their known influence over the Indians, through pledges made to them, accompanied by assurances that their removal west would, more than any thing else, serve to secure the existing relations between them and the Indians, then surely the department, instead of classing them with the Indian skins and furs, would require a punctilious redemption of those pledges. I have not heard of a solitary Indian desiring the privilege to sell."

The President at last yielded, and the agent was authorized to prohibit any person entering the nation to buy slaves. But it was too late—the negroes well knew how anxious the whites were to possess them and they reasonably feared that if the Indians were expelled, instead of being permitted to accompany their kind masters, they would be consigned to the cruel and detested service of Georgia and Alabama planters. Hence, impelled by the most powerful motives which can stimulate the heart and nerve the arm of man, they resisted to the utmost the emigration of their masters, and in the deadly struggle that ensued, evinced their devotion to the Indians, and successful courage which may well send a thrill of fearful anti-ipation throughout the slave region.

We now submit to our readers whether the facts we have exhibited do not prove beyond all doubt, that the blood and treasure expended in the Florida war, have been expended for the sole purpose of breaking up a refuge for fugitive slaves; and that the Seminoles have been goaded into their extraordinary and desperate resistance, by the frauds and robberies of slaveholders!

* Mr. Thompson was not an abolitionist, but had lately been a representative in Congress from the State of Georgia.

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Montpelier, Oct. 1839.

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